N° 88. SATURDAY, *October* 7, 1786.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

SIR,

IN a late Paper you have given to the Public, you presented us with the character of a gentleman possessed of sensibility and delicacy of feelings, but destitute of virtuous exertion. Allow me to introduce to your readers the character of another, considerably different, the view of which may not perhaps be altogether without its use, and may make some addition to the number of original portraits you have given to the Public.

*Dormer* is a man who is not only free from vice, but who is possessed of a considerable regard for virtue; and yet when his character comes to be considered attentively, it will be found defective in many very important respects. Dormer's great object is the public good, and to this he dedicates his whole time and labour.

Part of the year he lives in the country; and when there, he is constantly occupied in contriving schemes for the advancement of agricul-

ture and the improvement of manufactures. He has written a number of little treatiſes upon thoſe ſubjects, and his houſe is conſtantly filled with thoſe pamphleteers and projectors, who, like him, talk of nothing but the good of their country. At county-meetings he never fails to attend, and there he conſtantly ſupports or oppoſes ſome ſcheme, as beneficial or pernicious to the public good. When any plan is propoſed, which by theoretical deduction it can be ſhown may poſſibly be attended with ſome general advantage, but which will certainly be very hurtful to ſome individuals, Dormer is ſure to give it his warmeſt approbation and ſupport. His conſtant maxim is, that the intereſt of individuals ſhould never be put in competition with that of the Public. From a ſteady adherence to this maxim, he thinks nothing of demoliſhing houſes, rooting out incloſures, or diſpoſſeſſing tenants. I have known him, for the purpoſe of ſtraightening a highway only a few feet, pull down a houſe by which a widow and a numerous family of children were turned out to the open air.

The ſame love of public utility attends Dormer when he comes to town. He views with admiration the public works which are going on, and viſits with great ſatisfaction the different improvements. He talks with apparent philan-

thropy

thropy of the rapid progreſs this country is making, and bleſſes himſelf for having lived at a period of ſo great advancement.

He ſays, it ever ſhall be his object to contribute as much as a poor individual can to every thing which is of national importance. Actuated by ſuch motives, he is a good ſubject to government; and one of his favourite tenets is, that the powers that are ſhould be implicitly ſubmitted to. To every magiſtrate, and every perſon in public office, he pays the moſt paſſive obedience; and when once a law is enacted, he is for enforcing it without mitigation, though it ſhould produce the ruin of the moſt innocent individuals. At a Circuit, he conſtantly waits upon the Judges, values himſelf on the reſpect and attention he pays them; and on all occaſions is for inflicting rigorous puniſhments on the perſons convicted of crimes, without paying regard to any alleviating circumſtances in their caſe.

I do not wiſh to find fault with theſe, or at leaſt with all of theſe particulars in Dormer; nor do I mean to ſay, that he is not ſincere, or that his conduct does not proceed from a real concern for the good of the public. But when I allow this, I allow him all he is intitled to,— That he has a regard for the public intereſt.— This is the whole merit of his character.

But are there not private virtues, are there not private interefts and attachments, that are as important as neceffary to conftitute a virtuous character, as a regard for the public intereft? And ought general confiderations of utility to fuperfede the attention to every thing elfe? In the conduct of Dormer they certainly do.

His love for the public is fuch, that he pays no attention to his family; the public engroffes him to fuch a degree, that he has no time for private friendfhip, or for the exercife of private virtues. His wife and daughters are unattended to at home; and his fon, an excellent young man, is defpifed by him, becaufe he does not like public meetings, and does not chufe to buftle for the good of his country. No one can tell of any charitable deed performed by Dormer; of any perfon in diftrefs relieved by his generofity. To give this relief would be contrary to his principles, as he holds charity and generofity to be baftard virtues; he fays, that if there were no charity there would be no idlenefs.

By unavoidable misfortunes in trade, a coufin of his, of the faireft and beft character, was reduced in his circumftances. Dormer was applied to for his name to a fubfcription for this gentleman's relief and that of his family; but he refufed; faid he thought it wrong to try to keep

keep them in a genteel ſtyle; that the loweſt ſtation in ſociety is the moſt uſeful; and that, in his opinion, the ſons ſhould be bred mechanics, and the daughter put out to ſervice.

I have already ſaid, that I do not mean to deny that Dormer is ſincere in what he profeſſes, in having the real good of the public at heart; but yet this admiſſion which I have made muſt be taken with ſome allowance. His regard for the public, the concern which he takes in projects of advancement in agriculture, manufactures, and public works, does not ſo much proceed from a feeling of the happineſs which this advancement will produce, as from a love of theory, of what is calculated to promote that theory, from a fondneſs for order, and for every thing conſpiring to one great and general end. Were his views directed by a concern for the happineſs produced by his plans, he would in ſome caſes allow the comfort of individuals to enter into his regards.

A very ingenious philoſopher, who poſſeſſes a ſingular power of illuſtration, joined to an uncommon depth of thinking, in ſpeaking of the reaſon why utility pleaſes, has remarked, "That "the fitneſs, the happy contrivance of any pro-"duction of art, is often more valued than the "very end for which it was intended; and that "the exact adjuſtment of the means for attain-

"ing any conveniency or pleaſure, is fre-
"quently more regarded than that very con-
"veniency or pleaſure, in the attainment of
"which their whole merit would ſeem to con-
"ſiſt.

"When a perſon," continues this author, "comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs "all ſtanding in the middle of the room, he "is angry with his ſervant; and rather than "ſee them continue in that diſorder, perhaps "takes the trouble himſelf to ſet them all in "their places, with their backs to the wall. "The whole propriety of this new ſituation "ariſes from its ſuperior conveniency in leaving "the floor free and diſengaged. To attain this "conveniency, he voluntarily puts himſelf to "more trouble than all he could have ſuffered "from the want of it, ſince nothing was more "eaſy than to have ſet himſelf down upon one "of them, which is probably what he does "when his labour is over. What he wanted, "therefore, it ſeems, was not ſo much this "conveniency, as that arrangement of things "which promotes it; yet it is this conveniency "which ultimately recommends that arrange-"ment, and beſtows upon it the whole of its "propriety and beauty.

"A watch, in the ſame manner, that falls "behind above two minutes in a day, is de-

"ſpiſed

" ſpiſed by one curious in watches. He ſells it
" perhaps for a couple of guineas, and purchaſes
" another at fifty, which will not loſe above a
" minute in a fortnight. The ſole uſe of watches,
" however, is to tell us what o'clock it is, and
" to hinder us from breaking any engagement,
" or ſuffering any other inconveniency, by our
" ignorance in that particular point. But the
" perſon ſo nice with regard to this machine,
" will not always be found either more ſcrupu-
" louſly punctual than other men, or more
" anxiouſly concerned upon any other account to
" know preciſely what time of day it is. What
" intereſts him is not ſo much the attainment
" of this piece of knowledge, as the perfec-
" tion of the machine which ſerves to attain
" it."

The ſame author afterwards obſerves, that it is a ſimilar principle which frequently ſerves to recommend thoſe inſtitutions that tend to promote the public welfare.

Something of this kind may afford the key to Dormer's character. In all his ſchemes, in all his projects, it is not ſo much the end which he has in view, as the mode of producing that end. For this he ſacrifices the happineſs of individuals; nay, the aggregate happineſs of a whole ſociety does not fill or intereſt his mind ſo much,

as the fitness of the meaſure by which, after many hardſhips and oppreſſions, that object may be produced.

I am, &c.

T. L.

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If the account which is given by my correſpondent of Dormer's character be a juſt one, and I am perſuaded, by my own obſervation, that it is not out of nature, ſeveral uſeful leſſons may be learned from it. We may be taught the danger of ſuffering attention to one part of our conduct to ſwallow up our regard for every other; we may perceive the hazard of allowing notions of public utility to extinguiſh private virtues. Theſe laſt are indeed indiſpenſably neceſſary to conſtitute the perfection of any character, and to all of us, except a very few, are the only virtues within our reach.

It may be told thoſe men, who, like Dormer, arrogate to themſelves the praiſe of public ſpirit, and look down with contempt on the humbler virtue of ſuch as are occupied in the private concerns of life, that they are not quite ſo remote from ſelfiſhneſs as they would ſometimes have the world to believe. The theories of Dormer

Dormer are as much his children, as that ſon and daughter, whom perhaps he will call it virtue to diſregard, in his violent attention to the good of his country; and when he canvaſſes with ſucceſs at county-meetings for the family of his projects, he feels as much ſelfiſh ſatisfaction, and much more ſelfiſh vanity, than if he obtained a penſion for his wife, or an appointment for his unfortunate relation. From Dormer's, and other ſuch oſtentatious characters, we may learn, that there may be often much pretenſion to virtue, and even ſome virtuous conduct, without much humanity, or much virtuous feeling.

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